



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Refuge Happenings

**May 2020:** *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is presently located in twenty-two different locations in the four primary Connecticut River watershed states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge is located in ten locations on the mainland and near shore islands along the northern shore of the Long Island Sound in Connecticut.*

#### The Art of Nature

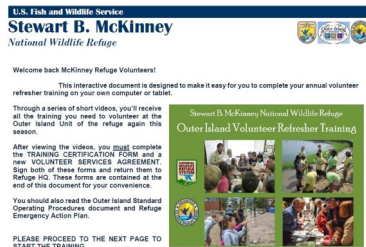


Photo Credit: USFWS

Nature is often a focus for many artists. This month, the beauty of the Fort River Division in Hadley, Massachusetts called upon several artists to capture the breathtaking views seen on a bright spring day. At the same time we informed and invited this group to share their art in our public gallery located in our Regional Office in Hadley. The gallery exhibits local artists' work and is open to the public for viewing. We are always looking for new artists to show their work highlighting the natural beauty that surrounds us.

For more information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)

#### Remote Volunteer Training At McKinney



Staff at Stewart B. McKinney NWR developed a remote training tool that allows returning island volunteers to complete refresher training from anywhere using their phone, tablet or computer. The training is interactive and uses a series of short videos to educate users. Volunteer Jim Lockhart filmed the video clips and was a huge help in getting this produced. After being sent out just this week, refuge staff have already received compliments on the document's convenience and ease of use.

For more information contact: [Shaun\\_Roche@fws.gov](mailto:Shaun_Roche@fws.gov)

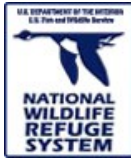
#### A Little Horseplay at Fort River



A family from Hadley took the requirement to have your pet on a leash to heart. While they were acknowledged for their creativity and determination to comply with this rule, they were not allowed to walk on the trail as planned. Luckily for them, the eastern section of Moody Bridge Road, which leads to the trail, is a public road with no prohibition against domestic livestock. Since the road is currently closed to vehicular traffic, it provides a great alternative for them to walk their pets. This was a "first" for us at the Fort River Trail, and one that fortunately gave us all a good laugh.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS



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May 2020

#### A Close Up View Of Barn Swallows



Photo Credit: USFWS

Visitors at the Fort River Division in Hadley can now see and hear live barn swallows nesting in the boathouse. The monitor at the interpretive kiosk is connected to a camera with sound, giving visitors the opportunity to experience and learn about sights and sounds of the nesting birds, while the birds are present and most visible from May through August. Presently, one camera provides a panoramic view of the colony, while the three other cameras are focused on active nests. We plan to create a video loop from the colony footage that can be shown outside of active nesting season. Soon, a permanent aerial insectivore interpretive panel will be installed with photos and additional information about wildlife at the refuge.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

#### Historic Lape-Reed House Gets New Roof



Photo Credit: USFWS

The Lape-Reed House, built in 1929, is located at the Salt Meadow Unit of the Stewart B. McKinney NWR. This month, Facilities Assistant Sean Healy oversaw the replacement of the 35 year old roof. The new shingles are meant to resemble slate, to help maintain the historic look. The shingles are rated for 50 years and up to 130mph winds, which should protect staff and resources for many years to come.

For more information contact: [Shaun\\_Roche@fws.gov](mailto:Shaun_Roche@fws.gov)

#### A Facelift For The Arena



Photo Credit: USFWS

Progress is being made on rehabilitating the arena at the Fort River Division. Conte Refuge staff learned that we will receive funding to complete siding the entire building. In preparation for the contractual work, Refuge staff will spend time preparing the building. In total, staff will install 1,200 linear feet of pressure-treated wood, 1,200 square feet of pressure treated plywood, ten windows and a solar powered intake and output on the north and south gabled ends of the 17,600 square foot building.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)



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#### Keeping Up With The Swallows



Photo Credit: USFWS

Staff from Massachusetts Audubon mist netted and banded barn swallows at the Fort River Division this month. In total, they captured 24 birds, 15 of which were recaptures from last year. Based on their bands, in 2019, 14 of them were banded in the stables and one was banded in the boathouse. We are thrilled to see the return of so many birds. Additional birds will be banded this season. The Fort River Division provides the perfect habitat for these aerial insectivores with vast feeding grounds, and resources and locations for optimal nesting. Pollinators, grassland species, and over 25,000 annual visitors to the universally accessible Fort River Birding and Nature Trail subsequently benefit from these land conservation outcomes.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

#### Barn Swallow Nesting Activity At Fort River



Photo Credit: USFWS

Barn swallows have been very busy nesting at the Fort River Division in Hadley. Between May 18 and June 1, nesting activity grew from one nest with two eggs, to 29 nests with 145 eggs. We are very excited to see such a large colony evolving in the boathouse this year. Outside of the boathouse we have observed four additional active nests on artificial structures with a total of 17 eggs.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

#### Raising Young At The Refuge

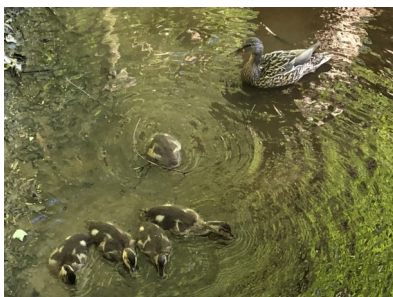


Photo Credit: USFWS

A banded female mallard duck is raising her brood on ponds at the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail. She started with nine young, and has retained seven of them. They seem to tolerate visitors well while swimming in the turtle pond. They have provided many entertaining public appearances, often just feet away from visitors as the young feverishly feed in the shallow water under the watchful eye of the hen.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)





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### Creating Cold Water Habitat at Dead Branch



Photo Credit: USFWS

We created another wetland area at our Dead Branch Division this month. We planted a grass cover and will follow that with planting trees around the area, creating a canopy that will help keep it a cold water and interior nesting habitat. In an attempt to accelerate this process we are working with Eversource to possibly remove trees from a nearby right-of-way and replant them by the wetland location.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

### New Hampshire Presidential Range Rail Trail Project



Photo Credit: David Govatski

The New Hampshire Trails Bureau received funding from the Federal Land Access Program to improve four miles of rail trail that runs through the Pondicherry Division. The project consists of upgrading the trail surface, reclaiming the drainage ditches, replacing old culverts and installing beaver deceivers. The Pondicherry Division is adjacent to the White Mountain National Forest. Due to its proximity to the National Forest and its abundance of wildlife, the Pondicherry Division continues to grow in popularity.

For more information contact: [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

### Finding Refuge In Nature



Photo Credit: USFWS

Since late March, when many public places closed for safety reasons, several outdoor recreational locations remained open, including the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail. Conte staff quickly recognized a dramatic increase in visitation over the next few months. Our Division of External Affairs took a deeper look into this trend happening on refuges across the Region. Read more about this uptick in outdoor recreation and how we might monopolize on this "accidental" phenomenon: <http://ow.ly/UvIR50zN3Xy>

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)



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### Upper Connecticut River Aquatic Organism



Photo Credit: USFWS

A group representing federal, state and NGOs has formed to identify and address aquatic organism passage issues in the tributaries that feed the upper Connecticut River in Vermont. The group members are actively collaborating to leverage their expertise and resources to benefit aquatic species in Northeast Vermont. With over 200,000 acres of conserved lands in Northeast Vermont, the collaboration will allow for limited resources to be targeted to high priority culvert replacement projects.

For more information contact: [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

### Sunken Vessel Recovered At Stewart B. McKinney NWR



Photo Credit: U.S. Coast Guard—Sector Long Island Sound

On the morning of May 6th, the U.S. Coast Guard was informed that a 44-foot pleasure vessel struck and grounded on Great Reef, located 200 yards off the Sheffield Unit of the McKinney Refuge in Norwalk, Connecticut. Norwalk Police Marine Unit Officers were first on the scene, and did an amazing job rescuing the two people aboard the distressed vessel. However, they were unable to tow the boat due to unsafe sea conditions. By that afternoon, strong winds and tides pushed the vessel off the reef, where it sank in 50 feet of water. The vessel had 150 gallons of fuel onboard at the time. Refuge Staff responded to assist the Coast Guard, and to monitor and determine if leaking fuel was a threat to beach habitat. Staff continued to coordinate with Coast Guard personnel until the boat was fully recovered. Thankfully no fuel leaked at all.

For more information contact: [Richard\\_Potvin@fws.gov](mailto:Richard_Potvin@fws.gov)

### Gravel Pit Recontoured At Dead Branch



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month a contractor recontoured a gravel pit at the Dead Branch Division out of safety concerns. In the process we eliminated a six to seven foot drop off on the north end of the pit.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)



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### Electric Utility Structure Replacements



Photo Credit: Dave Small

Many of the wooden electric transmission structures within the electric utility right-of-way at the Pondicherry Division are deteriorating to the point of requiring replacement. This summer, one dozen wooden structures will be replaced within the right-of-way. A pair of osprey have built a nest on one of the wooden structures. The New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game and New Hampshire Audubon are actively assisting with developing mitigation measures for the osprey nest.

For more information contact: [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

### Annual Road Opening at Nulhegan Basin Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

On an annual basis, the road network at the Nulhegan Basin Division is closed to motor vehicles during mud season. Every year the Refuge's gates are unlocked before Memorial Day weekend and remain open through the end of snowmobile season. The annual temporary road closure is a measure taken to proactively protect the roads from becoming rutted when the ground is saturated.

For more information contact: [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

### May Brings Opportunity For Great Photos At The Refuge

Shown below: Canada mayflower at McKinney, green frog at Fort River, flowering dogwood at McKinney, and Jack in the pulpit at Fort River.  
Photos: USFWS

